Pulse

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by Metaphysicalash

Summary

Months into their relationship, Will finds out Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper the hard way, and this causes a rift between them. Hannibal had tried hard to blind him from the truth until the right time to tell him came, but the damage was done.
When Will is shot and taken to the hospital, and his life is in Hannibal's hands, Hannibal realizes nothing is worth losing Will. The harrowing possibility of a life without Will proves too much for Hannibal to even imagine. And he is prepared to do anything to keep Will in his life forever.

Notes

This is based a prompt by @NOLANPRICE on twitter.

I read actual medical research papers and articles just to write this. I absolutely don't know anything about medical stuff, and I know there are a bajillion inaccuracies in this, but please go easy on me😭 I tried my best, and I really hope you enjoy reading <3

I hope I tagged this right. It does contain some brief description of surgical methods, mentions of blood. Just giving you a heads up.

Shout-out to @cestkloug on twitter for beta-reading :) Any inaccuracies and errors are all mine

Hannibal closed his eyes and exhaled a gust of air, preparing to leave for the night after a long surgery. He pulled down the mask covering his face and moved away the damp, matted strands of hair falling down his face. He wanted to get home and get as much rest as he could, since this had been one of those long, exhausting days. Particularly with in mind, and hoping to go over to Will's house in the morning.

The thought of Will made him woeful. They'd been in a relationship for months now, and although Will wasn't aware of Hannibal's darker tendencies and violent endeavors, he had his suspicions. Nonetheless, he always chose to trust Hannibal no matter what. Will wasn't aware of what consisted of the food Hannibal served him. Nor the fact that his lover was behind many of the gruesome murders he'd encountered in his line of work. The evidence always led to other serial killers who matched the profile; perfectly set up by Hannibal to mislead the cops. And it was almost always scrupulous.

However, Hannibal was aware of Will's instincts and his empathy.

Deep down, Will knew something was not adding up whenever the bureau arrested a suspect. Always attuned to his intuitions, he felt there was more to the crimes than what was presented.

Hannibal had always admired Will's sharp mind, but admittedly, this became an inconvenience whenever Will brought up certain questions during their conversations. Subtle questions which Hannibal was well-aware were subconsciously finding his own stance on murder. For the most part, he'd make sure his answers gave nothing away, but this was not always guaranteed. Will was too clever and paranoid. Hannibal had sensed his doubts and skepticism in the reluctant kisses Will gave him, or occasional unenthusiastic love-making that suggested Will's mind was elsewhere.

Hannibal knew.

He had intended to tell Will the truth eventually, when time saw fit. Until then, he blinded him from it. Even lied and manipulated him in order to preserve it. He didn't think Will was ready for it.

Unfortunately, Will found out the hard way.

Hannibal had often imagined all the different scenarios where he'd tell Will who he really was, but none of those scenarios involved Will catching him in the act. Because that was what had happened. Reality was often adventitious that way.

Hannibal could still remember the stark disbelief on Will's face when he saw Hannibal's blood-stained hands, the clear plastic murder suit, and the butchered remains of a freshly killed victim.

He remembered opening his mouth to speak to Will only to watch the man leave without a word, as stupefied as he came.

That was the last time he had spoken to him. It had been two weeks since.

Will was going to find out eventually, anyway. Hannibal only wished he could have had control in how he found out. Perhaps the fact that Hannibal hid a secret as massive as that from him under a plethora of lies and manipulations, affected Will a lot more than the truth itself. Will had entrusted him with his own secrets, things he was usually reticent about. Hannibal was the first person he'd allowed into his personal circle. Breaking that trust, this was one of Hannibal's greatest regrets.

His transgressions became exceedingly clear to him, nagging at him on the inside, asking him to do something about it. Will's absence aggravated his guilt. He wanted nothing more than to get his lover back. His life felt incomplete without him. He was unable to imagine a world without Will, his Patroclus.

Hannibal had been surprised that Will didn't go to the FBI. He could have, as soon as he had found out who the Chesapeake Ripper was. But he didn't. Hannibal was uncertain as to why and often wondered whether Will was better off without him.

While this was most probable, it didn't mean Hannibal could or would survive without him. He couldn't stand being apart from Will for a second, let alone two weeks. Hannibal had never noticed it too much before since Will was always around. It was only after Will left that Hannibal felt the weight of the gaping void he left behind and realized what he had taken for granted. Hannibal knew he had hurt Will, but wasn't sure how to mend it. However, he was prepared to do anything to get him back.

"Doctor Lecter!" a yell tore through the corridor and interrupted his train of thought.

Hannibal looked up to see Jack Crawford, Beverly, and a few doctors rushing someone on a stretcher towards him and the ICU ward behind him.

And for a moment, he couldn't breathe.

He rushed towards the stretcher without a moment's hesitation, glancing at the bloodied face of his lover. The dark curls stuck to his head.

"Will," he mumbled.

It felt like the air had been sucked right out of Hannibal's lungs. His gaze flitted to the doctor pressing a cloth to his chest, which was half-soaked in blood.

"I got this," Hannibal said, taking over and applying pressure to Will's chest. "What happened?"

"GSW to the chest," the doctor replied. "Pulse rate 164. He's gone into cardiac arrest."

"He…" Beverly added, shaky. "We were chasing a serial killer. It happened so fast." Her voice faltered. "God, I told Will to let him go."

She said something else too but Hannibal's frantically pounding heart drowned out her voice. He kept staring at Will, lying there bleeding and lifeless, and it tore him apart at the seams.

"Will, it’s me," he said, hoping the agent would hear him. "I’m here. You’re going to be alright.”

Hannibal continued to keep pressure on the wound as they rushed Will into the ICU.

Hannibal's breathing shallowed and his head spun. Fear had seized his entire body. Tears blurred his eyes, falling down his cheeks as he glanced at one of the other surgeons holding an endotracheal tube in Will's mouth steady, while another held a chest tube. The cloth on Will's chest was soaked red. Hannibal's hands trembled.

"Stay with me,” he said, voice faltering. “I need you to stay alive.”

This was supposed to be nothing new. He'd dealt with this before scores of time. His level headed mind and extensive medical knowledge led him to being the best there was.

But in this moment, the thought of losing Will scrambled his mind completely. And suddenly, the monitors seemed unbearable. The beeping resounded in his ears. One of the nurses helped put a surgical mask to his face.

"We're losing him!" another surgeon exclaimed.

Panic and anxiety gutted Hannibal as he shot a glance at the monitors, then at Will.

"No," he said. "Please don't do this, Will."

Along with the other surgeons, he had to crack Will's chest open to resuscitate him, to relieve any internal bleeding. He’d done resuscitative thoracotomy more times than he could count, and yet, he felt paralyzed because it was *Will*, and Hannibal was terrified of losing him. The hardest thing he had to do was force his mind to focus, and not wander into the dark, crushing prospect of losing Will forever. He couldn't and didn’t want to imagine it. He wasn't prepared to accept it. Not when they had the rest of their lives to live together.

His hand kept securing a grip on the scalpel as he prepared to make an incision. *Focus, goddamn it. His life is in your hands*. He steeled himself enough to do his job.

Even as his lips trembled after the incision, with his hands buried inside Will's thoracic cavity, and his heart was thumping so loud it might explode, Hannibal tried to force his emotions down. But the incessant beeping of the monitors and crippling panic was getting the better of him.

"This is not how it ends," he said, glancing at Will's face. "I won’t allow it."

Could he have prevented this?

If he had told Will the truth sooner, if he had stopped Will from leaving, could he have prevented this?

He and the other surgeons raced to revive Will. “Please, darling, come back. Don’t leave me. Not like this.”

Hannibal rarely had felt fear throughout his life, and certainly nothing like this. Not the kind of fear that clawed up his throat, that made him perspire, and nearly paralyzed him. If it wasn't for his ability to keep his head straight even in dire situations, he might've completely fallen apart as Will's pulse continued to drop.

"I refuse to let you go," he said, voice unsteady.

The resuscitation attempt thankfully bore fruit when Will's pulse finally stabilized. Hannibal exhaled a shaky breath, releasing a tear that ran down to his mask. He felt like his knees could buckle, but his resolve kept him upright.

The surgery was far from over. The next few hours went by with Hannibal's concentration solely on patching up Will's injuries after carefully and delicately removing the lodged bullet. Will required a blood transfusion. One of the nurses dabbed a cloth over Hannibal's forehead to wipe the sweat as he operated, resolute and unswerving; determined to save Will and get him back on his feet. He wanted to hear Will's voice again, to touch him, kiss him, hold him in his arms again. Will's impending fury did not matter. He would rather feel his wrath than his silence.

It was true that Hannibal was born out of darkness. He had lived in it, thrived in it and was used to it. But without Will, that darkness grew deeper. Too empty, too lonely. Will was his light, and Hannibal would be damned if he let that light go out.

Hannibal stole another glance at him in between. It felt like it was his life on the line, not Will's.

It was a scenario he never imagined himself in and never wanted to again.

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At the end of the surgery, Hannibal was so overcome with exhaustion that he spent the entire day by Will's bedside, passed out in a chair, still in his scrubs. His hand lay on Will's bed, holding the other man's hand, ensuring Will would not leave him again. Strands of messy hair fell down Hannibal's forehead as his head hung low in slumber.

He awoke hours later, tired and hungry, determined to stay beside Will. Will remained under observation. Jack had left an hour ago, but Beverly stayed back. She had been asleep on the bench outside the ICU. She pinched her eyes and stood as Hannibal finally exited the ICU.

"How is he?" she muttered, voice hoarse.

"He's under observation," Hannibal replied. "We're monitoring him very closely. I request that you stay by his side for a while. I'll return within the hour."

Beverly nodded and headed into the ICU.

Hannibal went home and took a shower, all the while thinking of his love. Will would think of him as a monster. Hannibal wondered how Will would react if he saw the monster cry, his tears indistinguishable from the shower water raining on his face.

Hannibal swiped a hand down his face, letting the hot water wash away the sweat and the sleep. But it couldn't wash away the affliction of having Will's blood on his hands.

Even as Hannibal cooked something for himself, it lacked its usual finesse. It was rushed and half-hearted. He just wanted to get something quickly into his system that would sustain him before rushing back to the hospital to be with Will.

His choice in clothes was quick and practical, settling for a cashmere sweater over a white shirt, and trousers. Then grabbed his suit from the chair before leaving.

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If anyone laid eyes on Will they would wonder - *who could ever hurt someone as beautiful as him?* He lay there like an ethereal slumbering angel, bathed in sunlight, his brown curls turning golden brown, his chest slowly rising and falling, each breath aided by the machines. *Who could ever bear to lay a scratch on his skin, touch a hair on his head?*

Hannibal wondered the same, as he stood there looking down at him. Although it didn't come with a pang of guilt, as he had tried hurting Will before. He almost came close. They had a complicated relationship for the past few months. Whatever the reason—whether out of some twisted notion of love, or the fear of losing Will, or the misconception that he had somehow betrayed him, the truth was that Hannibal had thought of hurting him. And now, that stung him.

He regretted all of it. Oh, how he wished he could turn back time and make things right. Now he watched his beloved lie there, fighting for his life, and was faced with the harsh reality of what it might be like if Will didn't exist in his life.

It was a harrowing nightmare.

Hannibal reached out to hold Will's face in his hands, fingers gently caressing the soft curls, and leaned down to press a kiss to his forehead. He closed his eyes when he did, releasing a tear that rolled down to his lips and dampened Will's forehead.

He checked the bandages on Will's chest and head before taking a seat near him, staring at him out of teary eyes. He curled his fingers around Will's hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. There were so many things he wanted to say but he was never candid with his feelings. It was hard for him to express. Instead, he brought Will's hand to his lips and kissed his fingers as a silent apology. A plea. A promise to do anything Will wanted if he opened those ocean blue eyes and spoke to him.

Hours flew by. Then a day.

Three days.

A week.

Hannibal had to unwillingly leave Will's bedside whenever he needed to go home to eat, or shower. Jack came occasionally to visit. He and Hannibal would talk about Will. Beverly visited often. She wouldn't say much. She would simply place a hand on Hannibal's shoulder and force a smile on her face to conceal her sorrow. She would stay for a while, always asking about Will's condition, and then leave.

A week felt like ages to Hannibal. Too damn long to bear.

It was the eighth day. At this point, Hannibal was hiding the cracks in his chest. The agony clawing at him from the inside.

The chair beside the bed had grown uncomfortable too, and somehow distant. He wanted to be closer to Will, to feel his warmth.

Standing from the chair, Hannibal removed his blazer and hung it on the chair. He moved around the bed, eyeing the space next to Will where he could manage himself. He couldn't care less if anyone had a problem with him lying on the bed next to a patient. Ever so slowly and carefully, Hannibal adjusted himself in the scarce space next to Will, his right arm folded to his chest to avoid causing Will any discomfort. He placed his other hand gently on Will's stomach and took a deep breath.

Being that close to Will made Hannibal's stoic shell crumble. The resolve he'd been keeping up all this time collapsed under a burgeoning weight. He closed his eyes and lightly squeezed Will's arm.

"Will," he whispered. "I'm afraid I can no longer soldier on. The thought of you plagues me every waking moment. I never expected you to be my weakness, but I find myself collapsing into an abyss. I need you to wake up and save me from this desolation."

Along with the agony, Hannibal also felt a flare of red hot rage against the one who hurt Will. His eyes darkened as his mind imagined all the ways he would brutally butcher the serial killer responsible for this. People often are oblivious to the demon residing within Hannibal. Those unfortunate to witness it never come out unscathed.

And that was what he would do. Exact vengeance.

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Will cracked an eye open and took a slow breath. His body felt heavy and ached, and his mouth dry. The mild nausea was discomforting. The curtains were slightly open, allowing

some of the sunlight to seep through.

The sunlight shone upon soft silver hair spilling upon his arm. Warm, slow breaths lightly gusted over his skin. The Chesapeake Ripper looked peaceful and vulnerable when he slept. Hannibal's head and hand gently rested over Will's arm. Will stared at him for a while, conflicted between his affection for him and the unveiled truth. It was exactly his undying love for him that made the ordeal even harder.

How could he forgive him?

He wondered if he should wake him up, but Hannibal made that decision himself when he stirred. His sleepy eyes slowly opened before his gaze fell on Will. He raised his head and smiled warmly.

"Good morning, Will," he said, softly.

"How long was I out?" Will croaked.

"Nine days."

"You were here the whole time?"

"Yes."

Will's heart stung. "I saw you in the murderer I was chasing. I wondered what the difference was between you and him. I figure there's probably none. Both of you tried to hurt me. I suppose the difference is that he succeeded… physically."

Hannibal dropped his gaze.

"I know you have your justifications," Will added. "I don't expect you to regret—"

"Forgive me."

Will paused, brows pulling slightly as he looked at him. He couldn't tell if he heard that right or his brain was messing with him. But the look of silent pain in Hannibal's eyes was unmistakable.

"You're right," Hannibal said. "I do not regret being the Chesapeake Ripper. But I do regret hurting you. It wasn't my intention. I wish I could say I'd never hurt you physically too, but I almost crossed that line once."

"Yes you did," Will said, the feeling of betrayal thick in his voice. "And you might have your reasons, but that doesn't change the truth."

"I'm not trying to change the truth. I'm trying to stop it from separating us any longer." Hannibal paused. "My mind palace won't save me from the debilitating ordeal of a life without you. I know my transgressions have affected you. I cannot cease to be who I am, but I can vow to never let you go. I can vow to never hurt you again."

It sounded unconvincing to Will. "It's going to take a lot more than that. And I'm not sure you would be willing."

"I am. You only need to give me an opportunity."

"I don't know if I can do that. Nothing's ever transparent between us. It's all muddled. Confusing. Apprehensive. I can never tell which is the unvarnished truth."

Hannibal straightened himself in his chair, his face hardening with a rare conviction Will had never seen before.

"Then let me be forthright," he said. "You are vital to my life. I cannot and will not accept an existence without you. For this, I'm willing to cross any boundary, no matter how extreme, to keep you by my side forever. I don't care what it takes."

"Hannibal…"

"I love you, Will. And I know you love me. I know you can't survive separation either."

The gravity of those three words were akin to that of a black hole—inescapable and all-consuming. Will hated that he was right. In spite of the truth, whatever they had between them for the past few months had been real.

"Nothing's the same anymore," he said.

"I know what I've been, but you should know I would protect you with all I have," Hannibal replied. "Perhaps I hadn't done it right before this, but no harm will ever come to you, Will, not even from me. This I swear on my life. And should anyone dare to harm you, then I swear they will not be spared."

Hannibal didn't falter. Not one bit. This side of him, this confession and this unfeigned pledge was new to Will. He didn't know how to fathom it. He wanted to be angry, and rightfully so. No matter how far he strayed from Hannibal, his love for him always pulled him back.

"I don't know how to begin to trust you," Will said.

"I know," Hannibal replied. "Until you find that trust, I'll always be here by your side. And after that as well." His gaze dropped slightly. "All I ask is that you stay with me… *please* ."

The last word was soft yet piercing, vulnerable as it came. Will couldn't simply let go of the fact that Hannibal was the Ripper. Anyone in his place would've fled far away, but not Will. His love wouldn't let him break free from Hannibal. He wasn't scared. Hurt and betrayed, maybe. His mind berated him for being such a fool.

Right now, in this very moment, the unfathomable love in Hannibal's glimmering amber eyes was real.

Will reluctantly reached out to touch the older man's face, holding his cheek. Hannibal immediately closed his eyes and released a tear, exhaling a breath of relief that had seemingly been trapped in his throat.

He leaned into Will's palm, and in the softest of whispers, spoke, "I'm sorry."

Will was the only one to whom he would bother apologizing with such earnestness.

"I do love you," Will said. "Unfortunately, I can't stop."

"Then don't," Hannibal replied. "Don't hold yourself back."

He brushed his nose along Will's wrist before pressing a kiss to his vein. Leaning in, he kissed Will's lips. Gently at first, then deeper.

"Loving you consumes me," Hannibal whispered. "But I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Me neither, it seems," Will replied. "I know you've gone after that serial killer."

"I told you, anyone who harms you won't escape unscathed."

The man was such an enigma. It was the unremitting doubt inside Will that made him cautious. Regaining trust in Hannibal was going to be a hell of a task. Especially since there was the question of how many secrets Hannibal had kept from him.

He took his hand back. "Trust requires honesty. Can you be honest with me? What else have you lied about?"

"I only ever lied to protect you," Hannibal replied.

"Doesn't answer my question."

"I assure you, you'll eventually see it all."

"Then I fail to see a sustainable future for us until the whole truth is laid bare and there is nothing left to hide."

Hannibal didn't reply, and Will noticed his face fall. He looked away, towards the window. There was nothing more to be said. He knew Hannibal well. Although he could never escape his feelings for him, he still wanted to keep his guard up.

He wanted to discover for himself all that the man truly was before he could consider trusting him again.

He was in love with darkness, it seemed. And that darkness, despite what lay hidden in its depths, loved him for real.

That was the *only* undeniable truth.

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